



Counselling Children & Adolescents in Groups

Lecturer: Jewell A. Williams M.A.

Learning Objectives

- Ability to conduct group therapy sessions
- Awareness of benefits and challenges when counselling in groups
- Keen understanding of the therapist's role in Group Work

Counselling in Groups

- Group psychotherapy involves the treatment of a group of children or adolescents by a therapist or co-therapists with the distinct aim of meeting therapeutic objectives.
- Two main theoretical orientations exist - psychodynamic and cognitive/behavioural approaches.
- Behavioural psychotherapy focuses on altering surface behaviour while psychodynamic psychotherapy is more geared to helping children towards a deeper understanding of their own behaviour.

Counselling in Groups

- The structure and size of the group will depend on the therapist's approach.
- Groups for younger children typically include four to five children.
- Groups for older children and adolescents generally go up to nine individuals.

Counselling in Groups

- Group therapy with children is generally activity based and takes the form of developmental play groups (DPG).
- Children and adolescents are grouped according to their developmental stages.
- Therapy is geared to the individual's levels of cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social development.

Important Considerations - Stage Development

- During development stages, children and adolescents exhibit a range of cognitive, emotional, and psychosocial skills.
- Approaches to solving problems in social and academic environments, change as children master each skill and gain maturity.
- The aim is to design groups that capitalize on the skills attained by individuals at different stages of development.

Why Use Group therapy?

- Group therapy has proven to be an effective intervention modality for both children and adolescents.
- Therapeutic benefits include instilling hope, feeling a sense of belonging, acquiring a deeper sense of altruism, acquisition of social skills, correcting maladaptive behaviours.
- Children and adolescents are able to form bonds with peers in a structured environment.
- Feelings and ideas can be discussed openly, with reduced risk of inappropriate negative interactions (e.g., teasing, ridicule)

Why Use Group therapy?

- Groups enable individuals to understand that their problems are not unique to them.
- Group discussions may therefore assist them to appreciate that others share similar problems, fears, and worries.
- The group facilitates the exploration of a number of relationships and offers different models of behaviour.
- Group settings allow an individual to see the consequences of their own behaviour and to experience the impact of the behaviour of others.

Why Use Group therapy?

- Individuals are often able to articulate personal feelings and interpersonal feedback to their peers that they would have difficulty verbalizing to adults.
- Adolescents therefore stand to benefit, as they more readily accept feedback from peers than from adults.
- Therapy groups can be run in settings that may not easily provide the conditions necessary for individual therapy e.g. schools and remand centres.

Group Design and Conduct

- Consideration must be given to building and maintaining the group – establishing key therapeutic guidelines at the outset.
- The nature and composition the group should be considered when working with children and adolescents.
- Key considerations include types of groups - setting, age, sex, may include families or siblings.

Group Design and Conduct

- The size of the groups and the age ranges of group members.
- The readiness of individuals - preparation for group therapy is very important.
- Organization and setting – duration of sessions should be considered in advance, setting must be age appropriate and should address privacy and safety concerns.

Role of the therapist

- The therapist's role in group work determines whether therapeutic objectives are achieved.
- Strong leadership - therapist must demonstrate a capacity to protect all the members of the group and be able to manage group dynamics.
- Setting boundaries – containment within physical space and awareness of what each member of the group is doing.
- The need for acceptance and respect of all group members should be enforced and demonstrated by the therapist.

Resources

Reid, S. & Kolvin, I. (1993). Group Psychotherapy for Children & Adolescents.

<http://europepmc.org/articles/PMC1029470>